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THE LIBRARY AND POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION

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BY  
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### THE LIBRARY AND POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

I HAVE been asked to speak on the subject "The library an essential agent in conserving and advancing the results of formal school education." To approach such a formidable topic we must first face the problem presented; must understand its scope and its meaning. Fundamental in any consideration of this subject is the question of how large a part of the citizenship of the country has had any formal education at all; that is, how far do our schools actually reach the population of school age of the United States?

It was a very disagreeable shock to most Americans to read the figures about illiteracy in the National Army, a shock tempered only in part by the explanation that they were based on inability to read and write the English language. It would perhaps be an equally severe shock to the average taxpayer, who has become accustomed to lavish expenditures for schools, to realize how very large is the number of people who manage to avoid even the merest rudiments of formal education, either by direct escape from all schooling, or by dropping out after a few terms. Despite our compulsory school laws, and despite child-labor laws, it is a matter of common knowledge to all schoolmen that there is a steady dropping away after the earlier years. To this we have become so accustomed that we ordinarily take the facts for granted, and fail to realize their significance to society. Masses of our citi-

zenship have had but a few terms in school and other masses have escaped formal education altogether. It is perhaps not too much to say that the average American citizen—to say nothing of the notoriously illiterate mass of foreign-born dwelling among us—has had so little schooling that it has formed a minor part of his education.

What has educated the unschooled or the partly-schooled? It is of course silly to deny that they have had an education—every adult human being has had one. Primarily, of course, it has been their contact with their kind, their social life which has trained them. And this is, equally of course, true of even the most highly developed product of the schools. President Wilson once remarked at Princeton—and it was one of his most profound observations on college life—that there was fully as much education going on in the college between four in the afternoon, when the classes closed, and eight in the morning, when they began, as between eight and four. The home is the primary center of early education—and its efficiency is said to be sadly weakened of late years. But by bitter necessity, his occupation, his business, is the chief agent in the education the average mortal secures. I need not labor the proposition—it is so true and so patent that most professional educators never see it at all. It is the struggle of wits in the earning of daily bread that educates in the truest and most effective sense the ordinary man or woman.

<sup>1</sup> An address at the Educational Congress, Albany, May, 1919.

Important factors in average education are the various occupations of such leisure hours as come to most folk. Whether it is a game of pool, or attendance on a baseball game, some form of sport enjoyed either as a witness or as a partaker, dancing, cards, a social smoke, the theater, the movies, or what not—recreation and amusement have their share in educating us. A very large share it is, too, and it is likely to become larger with that shortening of the working day which seems inevitable. The church has a part in education, to some extent a formal part in teaching, as well as in service, sermon, and social ministrations. Clubs of all sorts, associations, unions, societies, have their share. Man is molded by other men in his work and in his play.

And then there is print: *not* books merely, but all printed things. Newspapers first—and for many, many thousands last also, and all the time! Trade-papers, too, and pamphlets and posters. The number of newspaper readers in these United States must, it would seem, include every one who can read. The number of journals is legion. They all have their share in the education—such as it is—which our average man gets. And the weeklies! Not alone the ubiquitous *Post* which is read by perhaps one twentieth of our population each week, but scores of others, from the county newspapers to the obscurest trade-journal. Then there are the monthly magazines—many of them very cheap, and, I fear you would say, nasty also. We are the most newspapered and magazined nation on earth, I suppose, although I never dared get into the class of statisticians—you know their reputation. And last—and very much least, so far as effect on our masses goes—there are books. A hundred men read newspapers everyday of their lives for one who reads a

book even occasionally. Thus are the un-schooled educated by their kind and by print.

May I interject a word at this point? The education thus achieved is by no means necessarily bad. It is merely imperfect and inadequate. No matter how much schooling a man has had, he will not escape education by his fellows and by the newspapers. He will, let us hope, supplement both by wisdom gained from books and teachers.

As the years go on, and as our schools grow, more persons in proportion to the whole mass will have had formal training in a high school. And yet their number is both actually and relatively small at the present day. It is notorious that attendance on the early years of high school greatly outnumbers that in the later years, while the graduates generally form but a fraction of the number entering. Looking at secondary education from any advanced or even from a general viewpoint, its results seem rather slim and meager, particularly for those who have no further schooling. It may well be questioned whether the adolescent of eighteen leaving high school has any very profound knowledge or unusual equipment. He is, however, far more susceptible to the influence of print and of the higher forms of amusement than is the youth of the same age who lacks his training. To him books, in particular, make a direct appeal, however shallow his judgments on them. As a rule most high-school students have come into active contact with one or more foreign languages. This means far more to their education than is often apparent to the critics of curricula. Whatever may be the sum total of the effect of the study of foreign languages, there is slight question that it broadens in a peculiar way the mental horizon of the student. Such study awakens him to the existence of other

literatures as the reading of the vernacular ordinarily does not. Most high-school students get some instruction in history—and they all in these days are put through several years of what is known as “English.” They are not made competent critics of the great problems of life and thought by their high-school training; they are given the means to read widely and to base their conclusions on at least wider data than newspapers alone afford.

Then there is a small, a very small, percentage of our population who have had a collegiate, professional, or technical education. This percentage is slowly but surely increasing, and is ordinarily, of course, regarded by teachers and professional “educators” as a leaven destined to raise popular taste and to form the opinions of the multitude. Thanks largely to our state universities and our city colleges our college graduates do not come from the homes of the wealthy and the urban middle class alone, but represent to an ever increasing degree the homes of farmers and of wage-earners as well. There is small question in my mind that it is his receptivity to new ideas which chiefly distinguishes the college graduate from his fellows—and particularly to new ideas meeting him through the medium of print. A student well trained in the liberal arts is notoriously likely to be more proficient in professional and technical studies than one versed only in the elements of such studies—largely, it would seem, by reason of his familiarity with books and printed things and his agility resulting from a variety of mental exercises. Toward books at least such products of the college and technical schools are likely to be at once friendly, accustomed, easy—and yet discriminating. There is no mystery about the printed page which rouses either undue reverence

or instinctive distrust. Your college man has seen too much of the manufacturing of such stuff.

We have then—as regards the results of formal education—schooling, or whatever we should call it—a mass of partly lettered folk, a slightly smaller mass of what that peppery Irishman, Richard Stanyhurst, so aptly termed “meanly lettered,” and a small number of better-trained minds. All of them in our democracy vote on an equality. As a matter of fact, those whom the world’s work has educated to leadership come largely—but by no means wholly, as commencement orators would have us believe—from the smaller group whose formal training has been long and thorough. What is the attitude of the whole toward print—particularly toward books? The answer to that question establishes the present, and to a great degree the future, status of the people’s library in our communities.

Supposing that practically all our people *can* read—save that per cent. whose eyes are holden by lack of teaching—*what do they read?* As I said above, they read journals, newspapers, magazines—and a very few books. The laws, postal and economic, make for the publication of periodicals of all sorts. They are distinctly the present-day mode, whether in publishing the results of the most recondite scientific research or in reporting baseball games. The trades and occupations too have their journals, frequently half a dozen to each calling. Look over any news-stand and for once note the magazine titles, particularly of those you never read or think of reading. Compare notes with any grocer or barber or clothier or bricklayer. They all with one accord will tell you that they read their own trade papers. From the labor union to the Society of Mechanical Engineers, every organization

issues a weekly, monthly or quarterly paper. Moreover, the pamphlet which in the eighteenth century outran the newspapers in popularity—thanks largely to the stamp-tax—has again come into its own. I have no means of compiling figures on the production of pamphlets in the civilized world in the last five years, but I can bear witness—as can every librarian—to the marvelous number produced by the war and its varied phases of propaganda. They must have reached literally hundreds of thousands of titles in Western Europe and North America alone. And they are read by thousands to whom—seemingly—a bound book is anathema.

But good newspapers—really great newspapers—are becoming less and less common. The morning press is before our eyes slowly passing away under the daily assaults of the cheap evening paper, run essentially to sell advertising and for no other end. Commercial journalism is a highly profitable business, and the purveying of real news is one of its slightest concerns—at least, so it seems to an observer, prejudiced, no doubt, because always in search of real news, the happenings of the whole world. Despite the destruction of huge forests yearly to furnish the pulp-paper for these countless editions, it is to be doubted whether we have any dissemination of accurate information at all commensurate to the waste of trees. But we all read—and buy! Doubtless we shall continue to follow this river of text in an ever-widening margin of advertising to the end of our days—or until the river runs out entirely.

I do not exaggerate this paucity of news. If there is anything on which the American people should have had abundant and accurate information during the years 1918 and 1919, it is on events and conditions in Eastern and Central Europe. But

we all know how little we have had of real information. I don't know, you don't know, what has actually been going on in Warsaw and Moscow and Budapest, and Sofia and Odessa and Constantinople, since the armistice was signed in November last! Those little papers published weekly in Russian and Polish and Bohemian in certain small cities and towns in our country have carried pages of real letters and news accounts, I am told; but not so even our great metropolitan dailies. We have been fed with fantastic stories from one side or the other, each more lurid than the other—but what are the *facts*? Certainly they are not found in our ordinary journals. In truth it is only in our libraries—and then only when they are conducted on progressive lines—that a man (not possessed of abundant means) can get at the real news of the day. Here he can find papers of varying shades of opinion and belief. Here he can read pamphlets and journals which the man in the street necessarily misses. Here he can correct the omissions of the local or the metropolitan press. He can—if he will—inform himself. He can not at the club or in the train or in his home back of the stock-yards.

But he can do none of these things if the libraries have not been awake to the news situation. If they have not understood the difficulties, and if their boards of trustees have failed to back them up in providing the unusual journals and the less common papers. Not alone the ordinary run of magazines and papers which are found in the homes of cultivated people, but the new, the unusual, the foreign, should be in even moderate-sized public libraries, if they are to fulfill their function of supplying information and real news to the people who support them.

Did you ever stop to consider the rela-

tion between the modern apartment which has no room for book-shelves, the modern house too small for our fathers' copious black-walnut book-cases, and the gradual decay of the book-store in the United States? Do you ever ask yourself what sort of books children grow up with nowadays? Did you ever—as many a children's librarian has done—try to find out what books are actually owned in the homes from which the school children come? If you did, I am sure you have been appalled at the paucity of books—the actual dearth of books you have supposed every one knew by sight at least. The Bible is still the world's best seller—but there are thousands of homes, American homes at that, without one. In fact there are thousands of homes in our land without *any* books except mail-order catalogues and text-books which the children bring back from school.

And did you ever seriously stop to inquire as to the sort of books children ordinarily see in small news-shops? Go into any city or town and make a list of the titles of the books in the windows of the little stores where tobacco, candy, "notions," and cheap books crowd one another. I made a study of the books exposed for sale on West Madison Street in Chicago twenty-five years ago. It was a revelation to me. And only the other day in Buffalo I walked up from the station to the Public Library, and incidentally inspected the windows of two shops. Well, I found that the public taste had not altered very much! Jesse James and the Younger Brothers were still there, in a trifle more attractive guise. Instead of "Scarlet Sin" and other equally startling and fetching titles (with crude cover illustrations of the nude!) there was a sheet calling itself as a sub-title "America's most spicy sex-magazine." The dime

novel of my boyhood (by no means all bad, far from it!) had been changed only in outward form and the aeroplane and motor substituted for the hero's or the villain's dashing steed. Yes—the children of the poor have an alluring set of titles offered them daily. It is a wonder that the children's rooms in the library make any headway against this display—and really the fact that the children throng to them seems to me a tribute to the essential soundness of boy and girl nature.

And did you ever try to buy a book in one of our very small towns or villages? How often have I endeavored to find something even passable in the little, fly-specked group in the local drug-store. The last time I was marooned in a village for twenty-four hours I could only discover the *Detective Story Magazine*, having, I must confess, already read that week's *Saturday Evening Post*. By the way, the most interesting part of said Detective Magazine was the half dozen pages of advertisements—mainly for news of persons who had disappeared and never communicated with their families. But what is a mere annoyance to the passing stranger must represent a serious difficulty to the residents. Books are now sold in large numbers by the mail-order houses, but there are good book-stores in too few of our towns and villages. The department stores have well-nigh driven the retail book-sellers out of business in the cities. The fact is that our population—despite the enormous number of periodicals—is coming to be more and more dependent on libraries for even a sight of good books, to say nothing of the chance to read them. I offer no explanation of these conditions. I merely call your attention to the facts. On libraries lies the responsibility of furnishing printed matter other than the sheet bought for a cent or two and dis-

carded in the street-car on the way home from work. Post-school education so far as it is to be got from books, is likely for nine tenths of our people to be got from books in libraries. Private libraries are few and small outside of a select number of homes. Book-stores are fewer year by year despite heroic efforts of booksellers and publishers. Libraries are more than *an* agent in conserving and advancing the results of formal school instruction; they are in most cases *the* agent, the only one possible for the average young man or woman seeking further knowledge from books.

But no such statement as this—however positively made—gets very far—unless people acquire early in life the habit of using libraries in an efficient and comfortable way, there is little chance of the library aiding very much in conserving the results of schooling. The chief task of librarians at the present day appears to be that of overcoming the indifference of the community to their wares—and the inertia resulting from that indifference. It is a rare child who says to himself on graduating from school: “Now I must keep what I have won. I’ll go regularly to the library and read three nights a week.” Unless the library has established direct contact with school children, contact apart from school work as well as in it, it is vain to expect much use from the child released from the bondage of school duties to the greater servitude of daily labor. It is vitally important, if the results of education are to be conserved, that both librarians and teachers realize the need of cultivating the habitual and voluntary use of the library by children. If as a permanent result of schooling and of the persistent and intelligent effort of children’s librarians, there is formed the habit of turning to the library for help in work and for recreation,

then the results of school training are without doubt in a fair way to be not only kept, but deepened and strengthened.

If this contact is lost, it devolves on the librarian to restore it. Planning for such contact is one of the chief duties of a librarian—a duty too often overlooked. No matter how excellent the library on the technical side, if it stands unused and empty, if young people do not seek it of their own accord, then it is a poorly managed library. I shall not weary you with advice nor describe the subtle and effective methods of advertising now coming into vogue. Window-displays in stores and in the library building, efforts to seize current interest in various topics and to turn people to books about them; all these things are but aids toward making the contact between people and books. It is the librarian’s chief problem. He is gradually learning ways of meeting it, but he should surely begin with school-children and hope never to lose them from his roll of clients. Such other aids to the creation and maintenance of this contact as are in vogue, lectures, story-hours, and the like, may well serve his purpose. But it is the conscious study of this problem as his chief business which will most surely win the results aimed at. Each community, each group in the community, presents a different phase of this absorbing task. Bringing people and books together in the right way and at the right time is, must always be, the librarian’s largest work. And on his success to a great degree depends the conserving of the results of school training.

But if the problem be vital not alone to the success of libraries, but to that of civilization, no less vital is a clear conception of what is aimed at and hoped for in promoting the reading habit beyond the school experience. The most precious fruits of education, those which most of all

require care and help for their persistence, their preservation, are those ideals of conduct and those standards of taste which teachers have striven to instill. Not geometrical theorems or algebraic formulæ remain in the memory and become part of the mental fiber of a youth versed in mathematics—but a residuum of study which recognizes the necessity for logical demonstration and for exact reasoning and reckoning. The things of the spirit are the highest product of formal education. Their conservation is more imperative a duty, more honorable a care intrusted to our libraries than the purveying of business information or of recipes for cooking jam tarts. No agency is more potent in this preservation of ideals than certain types of books. Poetry and the drama above all serve this purpose. We respond to their appeal to our generosity, our loftiness of purpose, our imagination, our moral sense. They take us out of ourselves for the time. That katharsis which so impressed Aristotle as the supreme function of poetry is still its great apology. We *are* purged of the dross of self and gain and strife while we rise to the heights of the poet's fancy, or follow breathlessly the rapid movement of dramatic action. And to poetry and drama the modern age has added the story, the supreme vehicle for conveying the message of the great artist, the great teacher. Than these three there are no greater or worthier means of keeping alive lofty ideals, high purpose, serene temper.

In fact in this day the civic and educational value of recreative reading seems to be slightly obscured in favor of supposedly practical and informational books. But on a little reflection any one of us must admit that there are few influences more pregnant with possibilities of high results than recreational reading. By

every means should it be encouraged by librarians; instead of which we find them pointing with pride to its decrease. Eighty per cent. of fiction circulated is generally a lamented and decried item in an annual report. But to me it is properly an occasion for congratulation, for pride. If the fiction be good, wholesome stuff, rattling good stories, exciting and interesting novels, purposeful, artistic studies of real life, then the more of it read, the better. I would rather my boy would read a good story than spend the same time in a pool-room. I would rather read a good story myself than write papers for educational congresses. And I would be far prouder to think that I had introduced a community to such clean and wholesome books as, for instance, "Back Home," "The Prodigal Judge," "A Certain Rich Man," "Gold"—not to mention hundreds of others—than to know that I had helped some scores of people to information of passing moment and interest. The scholar does not decry recreational reading. He rather recalls Cicero's noble words in the Oration for Archias on the worth of humane letters, their constant companionship in duress and in joy, their comfort and their permanence. He recalls Dante's eulogy on Vergil—and he knows from his own life, what the recreation afforded by works of the imagination means to him. Denunciation of fiction reading is really crass Philistinism. The guiding of choice in fiction is a precious privilege granted to librarians. And in exercising it they must not forget the stern competition which they run with the shop window stories and with every other form of amusement.

One of the most successful aids to holding children to a habit of reading is the keeping up of the interest in some subject which has attracted them in their school days. It is a poor boy or girl who de-

velops no hobby in school life—at least who does not get started on the way to make a hobby out of an interest. His schooling may or may not advance him very far on that road. But the library can frequently give him the opportunity which the school can not. To the end of keeping alive an interest already aroused, the library and the school should be in close touch. The librarian should have the means of letting pupils know that there are scores, hundreds, even thousands of books on subjects which they first meet in class. For example, the geography classes open up the whole fascinating array of books on travel in the library. An exhibit in the school, or a visit of a class to the library may reveal to students possibilities of reading which will hold their attention and draw them to the library for years. Wherever there is a boy or girl genuinely interested in something on which books are written, there is a chance for the librarian to conserve—yes, to advance—the results of formal study. It is perfectly proper for him to buy books for the express purpose of promoting and keeping interest in some subject which has originated in the school. It is perfectly legitimate and indeed highly advisable to conserve clients to the library by keeping up human interest in all manner of topics—even when interest develops into that sort of hobby which makes life uncomfortable for the neighbors.

It is a proper thing also for the librarian to try hard to serve that smaller class which has received higher education. Most of us have stretched funds to the utmost to do it. But too few of the librarians of the smaller towns and cities have understood how easily by means of the inter-library loan they may serve people whose needs are so special and so advanced that they far outrun the meager resources of small

libraries. A librarian who is alive to the possibilities of borrowing unusual books for an unusual need, who knows the resources in books of the larger libraries, is a veritable blessing to the scholar isolated by occupation or need in an out-of-the-way place. To him such a librarian brings—at too high a charge as yet—the resources of the whole country. In fact practically *everything* is available by means of photoduplication—only the process costs a good bit. We shall yet get that cost down to a trifle, and then a librarian will have an agency of tremendous power in conserving clientele and in serving his town. Service to business is on much the same footing. It can and should be given—but too few are able to give it. The small town or small city library will fulfill its educational function only when it pays a living salary to a live librarian.

Were the educational function of the library confined to conserving the results both spiritual and intellectual of formal schooling, it would have ample justification for its existence, even aside from its services of another sort. But fortunately the library's work in advancing the results of formal education is equally patent, although necessarily such work appeals to a smaller group. What it lacks in number, however, it gains in definiteness. Vague problems, vaguely felt, are seldom well solved. But when we face very definite and particular needs, we generally make some measure of advance in meeting them. Such a need is found in the present efforts to establish continuation schools of various sorts. With the work of these schools you are perforce more familiar than I. You know how far they are vocational, how far they are elementary, how far advanced. But unless I miss my guess, there are none of them which could not profit by close



contact with the public library. The library can and should aid the instruction with books. It can easily provide (either at the school or in its own quarters) books both directly helpful in the instruction given and those leading on to further study. Night-schools and continuation schools offer a ripe field for the library's cooperation—a field perhaps as yet too much neglected.

There is pressing need in this country for Americanization work, for unfolding in a sympathetic manner the history, the government, the spirit of America to its foreign population. About this need and this movement also you are doubtless better informed than I. May I say, in passing, that it is my conviction that so-called Americanization will succeed just so far as it is done in a friendly, neighborly, sympathetic way? If we say to these folk—"Forget all you are and have been! Become like us! Be Americans!" we are not likely to win them to that spirit of democracy which we hold as our choicest possession. But if we lead them to know our ideals, to understand our ways, to comprehend their rights and duties as part of our body politic, if in short, we try to have them keep the best of their own past and take on our own spirit as well, we may have some hope of success. And the public library can do—is doing—much to aid. It can assist in direct instruction and can furnish much material in addition. There are few avenues of its work so promising of results—so well worth following. If we do our duty by continuation schools and Americanization work we shall surely justify our claims to recognition as an essential agent in popular education.

But not alone in these formal classes is popular education carried on. Few people realize the extent to which the

American people are organized into clubs and societies. If you will but cast up your own bills for annual dues of one sort and another, and will then multiply them by some such figure as one hundred million, you will begin to have some notion of how far we are grouped into social units. Not all clubs offer a field for the library's work. But it is wholly incorrect to suppose that the women's clubs alone read papers and use books to get them up. In any community, urban or rural, there are literally scores of clubs which might find books and periodicals of great assistance in their work. It is the librarian's privilege and duty to seek these out and to minister to their needs—of course with tact and understanding. They have a *right* to his services, and by those services the results of school training may well be advanced. The fact that the women's clubs have discovered the library is no reason why they should capture it. The same sort of service—rendered frequently in a different way—may be given to a great variety of other organizations. And thereby the library furthers popular education in a definite way, instead of shooting in the air.

Perhaps the strangest gap in the corporate relations of our public libraries has been their almost total failure to get into touch with labor unions. To ignore the unions in the present age is to cut ourselves off from one of the strongest and most vital forces moving in our social cosmos. As individuals many thousand union members make use of their libraries. And I have known some few librarians who have succeeded in keeping in active and efficient touch with the unions as such. Labor is undoubtedly going to secure a shorter working day than has been customary. Those hours released from toil must be spent somewhere. Need I say more? Is not the librarian's duty and

privilege plain in that very statement by itself? And is any duty more imperative than that of winning and holding to the reading habit the *men* of our land? It is *not* going to be done by the methods or the books which have been most in vogue among us. But it needs to be done—and that right soon.

And then there is the real student who is trying to keep up his studies—frequently amid the cares of his business or profession. In these days when so much of the world's discussion of science and the arts is produced in journals, the plight of the student lacking access to such journals is frequently pitiable. He can seldom buy more than a fraction of what he needs. He must depend on the library to aid him. And generally the librarian is forced to regard him as but one unit demanding much for his own use as against some thousands demanding little. But I appeal to the good sense of librarians and to their intelligence in urging them *not* to forget their duty toward scholarship. The high-school teacher trying to keep up his university work in physics or biology or Greek or history *deserves* our special aid and consideration. The young chemist in the big industrial plant, the young doctor with a special interest, the lawyer working up a line he began in law school, the clergyman yet intent on some phase of his reading despite the calls on his time and his

sympathies, the boy in the shops who digs away at Spanish—these are our rare and special clients. If we retain the spirit of the humanists, if we are true to the traditions of librarianship, we shall sacrifice much to aid such as these. We shall beg and borrow and buy for them. And we shall be of some little service, perchance, to the advancement of true learning.

There has come a great change in our library work. We librarians are convinced that we serve *all* the people—not a part alone, as most folk have supposed. We are trying to survey the whole field of our work—to understand our towns and cities and the countryside as well. We are studying them, charting the possibilities. We believe that we can make books useful and helpful to many people who seldom think of them. We are ready to cooperate with business and with labor, with schools and clubs and churches and homes. We serve all—and chiefly do we serve education, organized and individual. But no longer are we content to serve vaguely, indefinitely, hoping that we may somehow do good. We are striving for the actual, the concrete in service, and we are reaching our aim more and more surely each year. Thus—and thus only—shall we succeed by the very definiteness of our aim and of our labors in conserving and in advancing the results of school training.

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